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ABSTRACT

Among the many attempts made to document value patterns in American society, Robin Williams' analysis might be meaningful for investigating dominant values. A major problem with Williams' approach is that it never labels specific values but only describes general areas of conceived preferential behavior in which values might be discovered. Nor does it deal with the relative importance of different values. The purposes of this paper are: (1) to operationalize Williams' value scheme for empirical investigation; (2) to describe the relative priority accorded to various dominant values; and, (3) to differentiate value systems according to several major stratification variables. Data were gathered during the spring of 1973 from 3,115 heads of households in North Carolina, who returned mail questionnaires. The findings indicated that a high degree of similarity existed among the studied segments of society in the relative priority attached to most social and personal dominant values. However, the divergent priorities and intensity of concern between whites and nonwhites (regardless of educational attainment or income level) towards values concerning equality, achievement, and patriotism suggested a possible tension which could indicate potential value conflict. (Author/JM)

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DOMINANT VALUES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article operationalized Robin Williams' conceptualization of dominant values in America and studied the similarity and dissimilarity in value systems between different social and economic groups. The data were taken from a statewide survey of heads-of-households in North Carolina. The findings indicated that a high degree of similarity existed among the studied segments of society in the relative priority attached to most social and personal dominant values. However, the divergent priorities and intensity of concern between whites and non-whites (regardless of educational attainment or income level) towards values concerning equality, achievement, and patriotism suggested a possible tension which could indicate potential value conflict.

DOMINANT VALUES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS

Many attempts have been made to document value patterns in American society. Parsons and Shils (1951), Kluckhohn (1951), Williams (1970), Morris (1956), and Rokeach (1968,1973) have made theoretical contributions to the analysis of values. Others like Rodman (1963), Hyman (1966), Han (1969), Pearlin and Kohn (1966), Rokeach and Parker (1970), Glenn and Alston (1968), and Dillman and Christenson (1974), have attempted to empirically document value patterns in American society. Many of these researchers have clustered substantively related attitudinal items for assessment of differences in value patterns among various segments of the American population.

However, the widespread attention given to Williams' analysis of American values and the meticulous documentation of these values from the historical foundations of American society suggest that his description of values might be meaningful for investigating dominant values. A major problem with Williams' approach is that it never labels specific values themselves but only describes general areas of conceived preferential behavior in which values might be discovered. Nor does it deal with the relative importance of different values. Furthermore, little attempt has been made to empirically document this value scheme.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: (1) to operationalize Williams' value scheme for empirical investigation, (2) to describe the relative priority accorded to various dominant values, and (3) to differentiate value systems according to several major stratification variables. The results of this investigation should shed light on the relative importance of various dominant values and the degree of similarity or dissimilarity in value systems of different social and economic groups.

THE PROBLEM

Williams (1970:439) asserts that the stability of culture is premised upon the dynamic process whereby a delicately balanced system of values is maintained. In this regard dominant values are the core values of a society which perform essentially an integrative function (Schwarzweller, 1960). Both Parsons (1950:8) and Merton (1957:141) assume the existence of a single more or less integrated system of values in society. Blau (1967:24) also comments that "sharing basic values creates integrative bonds and social solidarity among millions of people in a society, most of whom have never met, and serves as functional equivalent for the feelings of personal attraction and unite pairs of associates and small groups."

Yet cultures slowly change. Individuals do not directly internalize dominant societal values but mediate and filter them according to the feedback and experience of reality to which they are exposed. Such basic mechanisms as social, economic, and racial position in society both are influenced by and influence an individual's life style and value patterns. For example, Rokeach and Parker (1970:97) demonstrated that variations occur in value systems because of divergent cultural and social experiences along with the personality formation. Specifically, they found that socio-economic status and race were major differentiating variables in the study of values. Rodman (1963), Hyman (1966) and Han (1969) argued for differences in attitudes, values and aspirations between the lower class and other classes (particularly in respect to "success"). In a recent study of change in American value systems over time, Rokeach (1974) empirically demonstrated that sex and race were major indicators of variations in value patterns within American society.

The crucial point here seems to be whether societal or dominant values are commonly adhered to by all members of the society (Parsons, 1950; Merton, 1957) or differentially adhered to by various segments of society (Rodman, 1963; Han, 1969; Hyman, 1966; Rokeach, 1974). It can be hypothesized that individuals while manifesting overall similarity toward dominant cultural values, might show some variation in the relative importance attached to certain values because of divergent life situations.

In the past, values often have been differentiated along two lines of thought.[1] This dual aspect of values has been variously called means-ends (Dewey, 1949), individual-social (Morris, 1964), instrumental-terminal (Rokeach, 1968), and group-personal (Kluckhohn, 1951). Employing Rokeach's value classification scheme, Williams' description of dominant American values seems to be terminal in content. Terminal values concern desirable end-states while instrumental values focus on desirable modes of conduct (Rokeach, 1973:7). Following Rokeach's line of thought, terminal values are further differentiated as personal and social values. Social values focus upon the relation of the individual to the larger society. These values are somewhat external to individuals, though presumably shared by them and can be considered as society-centered values. Personal values center on the individual's orientation toward self and may be regarded as a minifestation of the individual's personality (Rokeach, 1973:7-8). This clarification of value usage has practical implications for the interpretation of Williams' value scheme. By distinguishing between social and personal values one can ascertain whether differences in value patterns among various segments of society are societal or personal in context, whether differences are an adjustive function in

relation to society or the individual, and whether differences in value patterns among various segments of the population are limited to or expand across personal and societal considerations.

Accordingly, Williams' value configuration has been divided into two categories: (1) social values such as patriotism, political democracy, humanitarianism, moral integrity, national progress, racial and sexual equality and (2) personal values such as personal freedom, work, practicality and efficiency, achievement, leisure, material comfort, and individualism. The operationalization and labeling of Williams' value scheme attempts to synthesize, in abbreviated form, a list of values for testing.

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

Data were gathered during the Spring of 1973 through a comprehensive statewide survey. Mail questionnaires were sent to 5,082 heads-of-households in North Carolina. Heads-of-households were selected as the basic unit of analysis to facilitate interpretation of value patterns in terms of family units. It was felt that the head of the household mediates the larger cultural influences for other members of the family.

Respondents' names were pulled systematically from telephone listings of every community and locality throughout the state, based upon a 1/000 sample of the total population. In 1973, approximately 85 percent of the households in North Carolina had telephone service. Possible biases resulting from the sampling procedure include omission of those with unlisted telephone numbers which tend to be of middle and upper income and omission of those without telephones which tend to be the young, the mobile, and those of lower income. Because some of the individuals, to whom the questionnaires were addressed, were either deceased, physically

incapable, had moved out of the state, had moved with no forwarding address, or could not be contacted either by mail or by phone, 612 names were deleted from the sample. Of the remaining 4,470 potential respondents, 3,115 returned usable questionnaires for a response rate of 70 percent.

MEASUREMENT OF VALUES

Although Williams did not label specific values, his overall discussion of value configurations focused on specific concepts. To reduce these value generalizations to the empirical level 14 value items were selected. The wording of the value items, the relative importance attached to the values, means and variance for the values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Respondents were asked to indicate the relative importance of the values on a scale ranging from low (1) to high (4) and then to rank the three most important and the three least important. Looking at the overall hierarchical ordering of all 14 values in Table 1, moral integrity (honesty) ranks first. This is consistent with the research of Pearlin and Kohn (1966) conducted both in the United States and Italy. In their study, "honesty" is given the highest priority of 17 characteristics in both countries. Also in Table 1, it is apparent that equality ranks quite low and freedom relatively high, consistent with the findings of Rokeach and Parker (1970). Other interesting findings show that work is more important than leisure; personal freedom is more important than individualism.

This ranking of values can be regarded as one pattern of values shared among the sampled populous at a given time. Change of value patterns among the members of society could be measured in terms of the same value

patterns at different times. The present paper is not concerned with the changing aspect of value patterns, but will analyze this hypothetical standard of values for different social and economic groups.

Given the exploratory nature of this research and in light of past research on values (e.g., Hyman, 1966; Rodman, 1963; Han, 1969; Glen and Alston, 1968; Rokeach and Parker, 1970; Rokeach, 1974), three socio-economic and class related variables - income, education and race - were selected as likely indicators of differences in value patterns among various social and economic groups.[3] The analysis that follows will deal with (1) the relative priority and ordering of dominant values (both social and personal) and (2) statistical differences in mean scores for dominant values according to levels of income, educational attainment, and race.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

In general, the relative priority afforded to both the social and personal values is much the same for all groups whatever their level of income (Table 2). The only consistent reordering of social values can be

Table 2 about here

seen in the slightly higher priority given to humanitarianism over political democracy by those of lower income, while no change of ordering is apparent for those groups of higher income. No consistent recrdering of personal values can be seen across the levels of income.

Inspection of social values using one way analysis of variance, reveals significant differences in the mean scores of the various income levels for patriotism, political democracy, and sexual equality. The first two receive higher mean scores from those groups with higher level

of income. Sexual equality receives a slightly higher mean score from lower income groups although this value is ordered last regardless of income level. The only significant difference in mean scores for personal values across levels of income concerns the value work. Groups with higher levels of income attach greater importance to work than do those of lower levels of income.

Analysis of the relative priority given to both social and personal values according to levels of educational attainment indicates overall similarity in the ordering of values (Table 3). The only major reordering

Table 3 about here

occurs in respect to political democracy. This value is ordered second by those with "graduate work" and fourth by those with "grade school" educational attainment. Statistically significant differences in mean scores are apparent for moral integrity, patriotism, and political democracy. It was noted in Table 2 that both patriotism and political democracy receive a higher mean score from those of higher educational attainment. The opposite is true for patriotism. Thus, a paradoxical finding seems to be present. Those of higher levels of income and those of lower educational attainment attach greater importance to patriotism. The other social value which varies significantly according to educational attainment is moral integrity. While the latter ranks first for all groups, the mean score of this value is especially high for those from higher educational levels.

Among the personal values, mean scores for work vary significantly according to the different levels of educational attainment. Those of higher educational attainment, like those of higher levels of income, are more likely to have a higher mean score for work.

A major reordering in values appears when comparing the relative priority given to social values by whites and non-whites (Table 4).[4]

Table 4 about here

Non-whites place a higher priority than whites on both racial equality and humanitarianism (helping others), while non-whites place a relatively lower priority on patriotism and political democracy. The relatively high priority attached to racial equality by non-whites produces a major shift in their ordering of values vis-a-vis those of whites. The difference in the ordering of those values is seen even more clearly when comparing mean scores. The mean scores for whites are significantly higher than those of non-whites for patriotism and political democracy, whereas non-whites have significantly higher mean scores on the equality items. No major reordering of personal values is apparent along racial lines, although non-whites do afford a significantly higher mean score than whites to the value achievement.

These findings of dissimilarity of value rankings between whites and non-whites seem consistent with the research of Milton Rokeach. Of all 36 values studied by Rokeach and Parker, (1970:106-111) the priority accorded to equality by whites and non-whites was the most divergent. Rokeach and Parker (1970) found that most other value dissimilarities between racial groups (except equality) disappeared when whites and non-whites were matched according to income level and educational attainment.

Thus far the findings have indicated some significant differences between each of the three independent variables and several of the values under investigation. Assuming that the three independent variables are interrelated and following up on Rokeach and Parker's finding concerning the neutralization of the effect of socioeconomic variables when controls are introduced, the combined and individual effect of the three socio-economic variables are examined.[5]

Analysis of each independent variable while adjusting for the other two independent variables reveals that race has the greatest impact on both social and personal values (Table 5). Even when income level and educa-

Table 5 about here

tional attainment are controlled, race has a significant effect on the value for political democracy. The variable income shows no significant effect on social and personal values when the other independent variables are controlled. The interaction between educational attainment and level of income show a significant effect upon the personal value individualism. Analysis of the mean scores (not reported here) indicates that both those respondents of higher income with lower educational attainment and those respondents of lower income with higher educational attainment have a higher mean score for the value individualism.

IMPLICATIONS

The impression conveyed by these findings is that there is a high degree of similarity in the ordering of Williams' dominant values. This suggests that the hierarchical order of these values may serve as at least a hypothetical ordering if not a true ordering of dominant values. No major reordering of social or personal values result from different

levels of income or education, or both. When looking at the mean scores of the various socio-economic groups for each value (Tables 2, 3, and 4), there are some significant differences for the social values patriotism, political democracy, humanitarianism, racial and sexual equality and for the personal values freedom, work, achievement and individualism. However, the magnitude of the differences disappears when the influence of other independent variables is controlled (Table 5).

It is only when race is introduced into the analysis that major differences and reordering of social values are maintained. Non-whites (even when income and education are controlled) attach greater importance than whites to the social values racial equality and humanitarianism and less importance to patriotism. Likewise, non-whites consistently attach greater importance to the personal value of achievement. This seems to imply a pluralistic or divergent value pattern in line with the equal opportunity theme. The conflicting values between the felt justice through adherence to patriotism and the felt injustice through strong perception of racial equality, suggest a possible or actual tension in the value system of the studied population. This finding has added implications when distinctions are made between personal and social values. If personal values such as achievement are to serve as an important value for an individual's success, the significant differences in social values (especially equality) between whites and non-whites may be regarded as an indication of value conflicts in social sub-systems.

The finding that race is the key variable for uncovering variations in value adherence coincides with the research of Rokeach (1968, 1973, 1974). However, unlike the Rokeach and Parker study (1970), value differences, other than equality, do not disappear between whites and non-whites

when adjustment is made for income and education. When the variable race is introduced, the socio-economic variables income and education show little ability to differentiate value patterns for various segments of the studied population. The earlier research of Kodman (1963), Hyman (1966), and Han (1969) found that lower class attitudes, values, and aspirations differed from those of other classes. If race can be considered a class variable, this research supports the notion of class differences.

Finally, the generalization of the findings reported in this study must be taken in proper perspective. Although the sample is large and statewide, it is limited to one state and to heads-of-households. Likewise, the values under consideration are limited to those presented by Robin Williams. Future research can assess the implications for other states and nations and perhaps compare to other value schemes. More importantly, these values should be assessed at different points in time as a possible measure of stability and/or change of values in American society.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The use of the concept value is often confused with attitudes, beliefs and norms. However, these concepts should be differentiated as they focus on different aspects of culture. Values are distinguishable from beliefs in that beliefs refer to existential propositions regarding the structure and operation of the physical and social universe. Beliefs are true or false, valid or invalid, or not testable (Williams, 1970:443). Values are more concerned with end-states of existence (Rokeach, 1973:5). While both values and attitudes imply conceptions of the desirable, values are more general than attitudes and entail a hierarchy of order (Nye, 1967; Rokeach, 1968). Norms refer to a concrete prescription of the course that individual's action is expected to follow in a given situation, whereas values are the criteria by which norms are judged. Unlike values, norms involve at least two persons as actors, the ego and the alter (Williams, 1970:31). In short, values focus on end-states of existence, imply general conceptions of the desirable, and entail a hierarchical ordering. In this paper focus is placed on value systems which Rokeach (1968:551) has defined as "hierarchical arrangement of values, a rank-ordering of values along a continuum of importance."

[2]Aberle (1950:496) and Gillin (1955) have pointed out regional variations in value patterns. Thus, these findings from North Carolina cannot be viewed as representative of the U. S. Population.

[3]Since the questionnaires were sent to heads-of-households, the resulting data did not contain a representative sample of the female population. Most of the sample were males (79 percent). Thus, the variable sex was not employed in the analysis. Comparison of respondents' demographic characteristics (including sex and marital status) with Bureau of the Census data for North Carolina are available elsewhere (Dillman et.al., 1974:751-54).

[4]Blacks comprise approximately 38 percent of the non-white sample. The next largest group were American Indians which comprised 4 percent of the non-white sample.

[5]Because of the limited number of non-white cases and in order to have a sufficient number of respondents in each cell, the levels of income and education in Table 5 were limited to two. The cutting point for family income was $10,000. The cutting point for education was attending college. Due to the unequal size of each cell in Table 5, the three way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure employed a standardized technique (Meyers and Grossen, 1974:237-264).

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Table 1. Mean Scores and Relative Priority for Dominant Values.

Values	Mean Score	Variance	Importance of Values				Ranking of Values	
			Slight	Moderate	Great	Very Great	One of three least important	One of three most important
Moral integrity (honesty)	3.60	.39	1%	4%	28%	67%	1.1%	65.8%
Personal freedom	3.46	.50	1	9	33	57	2.0	49.1
Patriotism (to country)	3.26	.68	3	14	35	47	6.0	25.2
Work (your job)	3.25	.63	4	12	41	44	4.2	31.3
Being practical and efficient	3.14	.53	2	15	51	33	8.4	16.4
Political democracy	3.04	.81	6	20	37	37	16.9	10.4
Helping others (humanitarianism)	2.99	.65	3	24	43	29	5.6	20.7
Achievement (getting ahead)	2.89	.76	6	27	40	27	12.6	26.5
National progress	2.77	.70	7	30	45	19	17.5	4.4
Material comfort	2.65	.60	4	40	41	14	26.3	7.0
Leisure (recreation & taking it easy)	2.64	.80	9	37	35	19	36.5	7.4
Equality (racial)	2.55	.92	14	37	29	20	36.2	8.6
Individualism (non-conformity)	2.52	.91	15	35	32	18	34.1	6.4
Equality (sexual)	2.25	.95	25	38	24	13	56.7	2.3

Table 2. Means and Ranks of Dominant Values for Groups Varying by Income.

Values	Income Level: Less $3,000 (N=190)	3,000-5,999 (N=311)	6,000-9,999 (N=650)	10,000-14,999 (N=711)	15,000-24,999 (N=491)	25,000 or more (N=163)	F
Social Values							
Moral integrity	3.53(1)	3.53(1)	3.63(1)	3.63(1)	3.68(1)	3.71(1)	4.111
Patriotism	3.08(2)	3.18(2)	3.28(2)	3.33(2)	3.38(2)	3.23(2)	5.523*
Political democracy	2.83(4)	2.91(4)	3.02(4)	3.10(3)	3.19(3)	3.29(3)	9.567*
Helping others	3.06(3)	3.05(3)	3.09(3)	2.93(4)	2.95(4)	2.88(4)	4.263
National progress	2.66(5)	2.70(5)	2.76(5)	2.81(5)	2.82(5)	2.91(5)	2.619
Equality (race)	2.69(6)	2.60(6)	2.61(6)	2.52(6)	2.58(6)	2.37(6)	2.691
Equality (sex)	2.37(7)	2.36(7)	2.37(7)	2.22(7)	2.18(7)	2.04(7)	5.378*
Personal Values							
Personal freedom	3.36(1)	3.43(1)	3.53(1)	3.52(1)	3.52(1)	3.51(1)	2.693
Work	2.99(3)	3.12(2)	3.28(2)	3.31(2)	3.33(2)	3.44(2)	10.137*
Practicality	3.08(2)	3.06(3)	3.15(3)	3.16(3)	3.17(3)	3.20(3)	1.625
Achievement	2.78(4)	2.83(4)	2.92(4)	2.92(4)	2.91(4)	3.06(4)	2.398
Leisure	2.58(6)	2.58(6)	2.69(6)	2.73(5)	2.64(6)	2.69(6)	1.892
Material comfort	2.68(5)	2.60(5)	2.70(5)	2.64(6)	2.65(5)	2.74(5)	1.162
Individualism	2.44(7)	2.48(7)	2.62(7)	2.55(7)	2.52(7)	2.51(7)	1.615

* $p<.001$

Table 3. Means and Ranks of Dominant Values for Groups Varying by Education.

Values	EDUCATION				
	Grade School (N=337)	High School (N=1063)	College (N=841)	Graduate Work (N=275)	F
Social Values					
Moral integrity	3.50(1)	3.63(1)	3.65(1)	3.68(1)	7.73*
Patriotism	3.35(2)	3.35(2)	3.32(2)	3.04(4)	12.49*
Political democracy	3.00(4)	3.00(4)	3.20(3)	3.22(2)	19.67*
Helping others	3.02(3)	3.02(3)	2.94(4)	3.07(3)	2.75
National progress	2.68(5)	2.82(5)	2.78(5)	2.73(5)	3.09
Equality (race)	2.60(6)	2.53(6)	2.56(6)	2.71(6)	2.76
Equality (sex)	2.32(7)	2.31(7)	2.22(7)	2.19(7)	2.01
Personal Values					
Personal freedom	3.43(1)	3.50(1)	3.53(1)	3.47(1)	1.88
Work	3.28(2)	3.28(2)	3.28(2)	3.41(2)	7.92*
Practicality	3.05(3)	3.16(3)	3.18(3)	3.07(3)	3.91
Achievement	2.80(4)	2.92(4)	2.97(4)	2.81(4)	4.62
Leisure	2.65(6)	2.65(6)	2.76(5)	2.66(5)	6.75
Material Comfort	2.67(5)	2.70(5)	2.64(6)	2.56(6)	2.96
Individualism	2.50(7)	2.52(7)	2.60(7)	2.51(7)	1.46

*$p<.001$

Table 4. Means and Ranks of Dominant Values for Whites and Non-whites.

Values	RACE White (N=2612)	Non-White (N=372)	t
Social Values			
Moral integrity	3.62(1)	3.48(1)	-2.97
Patriotism	3.31(2)	2.96(4)	-6.48*
Political democracy	3.07(3)	2.85(5)	-4.07*
Helping others	2.98(4)	3.14(3)	3.23
National progress	2.77(5)	2.76(6)	- .21
Equality (race)	2.45(6)	3.23(2)	14.24*
Equality (sex)	2.20(7)	2.58(7)	6.63*
Personal Values			
Personal freedom	3.48(1)	3.34(1)	-2.67
Work	3.26(2)	3.23(2)	- .47
Practicality	3.15(3)	3.08(3)	-1.38
Achievement	2.86(4)	3.06(4)	13.53*
Leisure	2.65(5)	2.58(6)	-1.32
Material comfort	2.65(6)	2.70(5)	1.11
Individualism	2.52(7)	2.53(7)	.07

*$p < .001$

Table 5. Three way analysis of variance and test for interaction effects of the three socioeconomic variables for dominant values.

Values	F Scores for main effects			F Scores for interaction effects			
	Race	Education	Income	Race x Education	Race x Income	Education x Income	Race x Education x Income
Social Values							
Moral integrity	2.4	2.6	3.3	0.3	0.8	0.0	0.3
Patriotism	23.6*	0.4	4.1	1.2	0.1	0.3	0.3
Political Democracy	3.0	15.2*	4.0	0.2	0.2	0.1	1.6
Helping others	19.7*	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.6	2.9	0.3
National Progress	0.0	0.2	0.0	2.1	5.2	0.2	0.3
Equality (race)	174.7*	3.4	0.3	0.6	1.0	0.1	0.0
Equality (sex)	26.4*	0.6	1.1	0.3	1.3	0.1	0.6
Personal Values							
Personal freedom	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.2	0.3	6.4	0.2
Work	0.0	0.8	2.6	0.0	1.1	1.3	2.2
Practicality	0.2	0.5	1.5	0.8	0.0	1.6	0.6
Achievement	23.1*	0.0	2.8	0.3	0.1	0.9	0.9
Leisure	0.0	0.0	0.1	3.6	0.3	9.1	6.7
Material comfort	2.3	7.5	0.3	3.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Individualism	1.1	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.1	15.1*	3.6

*p<.001